



National Geographic Spotlights Tarawa!



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

By JO2 Crystal King

Heads turned and eyes darted towards a film crew onboard recently, as Sailors and Marines here became the focus of attention for the video cameras of a National Geographic television documentary.

The four-member film crew came aboard Nov. 14- 21 during Fleet Exercise operations, the second to last phase of the Tarawa Amphibious Ready Group's training exercises in conjunction with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, off the Southern California coast.

"We're making a documentary about the Sailors and Marines preparing for deployment, poten-

tially towards the Arabian Gulf," said production correspondent Michael Davie. "We want to paint a television portrait of these people, particularly the young adults, about their feelings and the lifestyle aboard ship, and what they think about the possibility of going to war."

Throughout the week, various crew members allowed the National Geographic team to share their daily lifestyle, as well as their roles in a variety of training exercises, including a mass casualty drill, well deck and flight deck operations and a search-and-rescue drill.

"We do this because we want to, not because we have to," said



ABH3 Carlos Peralta (left) directs Airman Christina Duvall as she tractor tows a CH-53E "Super Stallion" helicopter on US S Tarawa during Fleet Exercise.
Photo by JOC(SW) W. R. Polson

Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Garcia, one of Tarawa's search-and-rescue swimmers. "I know sometimes the public gets the wrong impression of Sailors, but I think National Geographic has a good idea as to what we are doing here."

"I think this will make citizens of the United States of America realize how hard the American Sailor and Marine work during a normal work day and how well trained and prepared they are in case they have to go to war," said Capt. Jay Bowling, the ship's Commanding Officer.

The documentary does not have a scheduled show date but is expected to air some time during Tarawa's upcoming deployment.

A personal letter from the **COMMANDING OFFICER**

Greetings TARAWA families and friends, and Welcome Aboard to all of our new families.

First off I would like to thank everyone for all the hard work they've put in during the past two months to help us get ready to deploy! We made it through this part of our interdeployment training cycle with flying colors. Now, we're officially ready to go overseas when we receive the call from the President.

During this time, we've been working more closely with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), which means there has been a large increase in the number of people onboard. There's been a little skepticism about all the new faces walking through the passageways, but so far we have only good things to pass along. Everyone has integrated really well, particularly in the areas where the troops mix, such as the messdecks, the gym and the ship's store. It always takes a little adjustment time for such things, but it's going better than expected, and everyone's getting along just fine.

We continue to look at various ways to help the Sailors make the adjustment from home to living on a ship. For example, we have a birthday meal every month. Our

Mess Specialists spend a lot of time in the galley to put together a great steak and lobster dinner that helps

**“Never under
estimate how
much your sup-
port means.”**

-Capt. Bowling-

make a birthday feel a little more like home.

Along those lines, we did have our pre-deployment fair at the Murphy Canyon chapel, which was a big success. Chaplain Karla Seyb-Stockton put on a fantastic event, and we passed out a lot of good information to help families

make it through the deployment. If you didn't get a chance to attend, please be sure to contact our ombudsmen, Nadine Shaw or Katherine Emery, to help you.

As we come upon deployment, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to all the families of our crewmembers. Never underestimate how much your support means to us and our job. We couldn't do it without you! Of course, when we deploy very early next year, that's when family support means everything.

I want to wish everyone the best during this special time of year. We are very fortunate to be able to take some time off to spend with our families. Thank you very much and have a happy holiday season!

The Talon

This newsletter is an authorized publication intended for families and friends of *USS Tarawa (LHA 1)* crewmembers. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official views

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Payumo Named Top Sailor of the Quarter

By JOC(SW) W. R. Polson

Ship's Service man First Class Alex Payumo is more than just your average USS Tarawa crewmember these days. In fact, he just happens to be the best amphibious Sailor on the waterfront for Group Three. Just ask Commander, Amphibious Group Three, which chose Payumo for the honor recently. Although the presentation of the award will be coordinated at a future date, Payumo has been officially recognized as Group Three's Sea Sailor of the Quarter for the third quarter of 2002 through a message released earlier this month.

"I was at my house when I received a phone call from my master chief



who told me that he had received the message from Group Three about my selection," said Payumo. "It was a great feeling."

Payumo's qualifications have been outstanding. In addition to his excellent performance as a leading petty officer of the S-3 Office in Tarawa's Supply Department, Payumo has achieved his qualifications for Enlisted Surface Warfare Special-

ist and Aviation Warfare Specialist. Payumo also volunteered his free time to help with several community-oriented programs, including Parents for Better Education, Adopt a Highway and the Special Olympics.

"This was a big one," said Payumo. "Receiving this award motivates me to keep working hard and to help my junior personnel to achieve their goals. Leading by example will

hopefully set the standard for others to follow."

One of Payumo's advocates, Tarawa's Command Master Chief Tom Shields, said that Payumo was truly deserving of this prestigious award.

"He's a classic poster Sailor," said Shields. "He

"He's a classic poster Sailor"

-Command Master Chief Tom Shields-

has both of his warfare qualifications, he contributes an incredible amount of time to his community and he's an integral part of the ship's crew. He's definitely on the fast track for success!"

What's your most important personal item for WESTPAC?



OS2(SW) Aimee Sowell
"Tictacs, because I can't stand dealing with people who have stinky breath."



BM3 Eric Wanner
"Pen and paper so I can keep in touch with those I care about."



DC3 Jonathan Swalley
"Pictures of my family and friends."



PN2 Theresa Bender
"My Bible, because God's word will inspire me to keep my head held high to get through WESTPAC."

MR. SECRETARY!



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

During the visit, Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Gordon R. England spent much of his time with the crew. Above, he talks to crewmembers during lunch.



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

In formation in the Hangar Bay, TARAWA's crew listens to the Secretary's speech.



Photo by JOC(SW) W.R.Polson

Reporters from Navy/Marine Corps News interview the Secretary in the Hangar Bay.



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

***Above, Mr. England takes time for a photo with Sailors.
Below, the Secretary and official party arrive on board by helo.***



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

On Oct. 24, USS Tarawa received a special visit from a special visitor. While the ship conducted training operations off Southern California, Secretary of the Navy the Honorable Gordon R. England flew aboard for a brief stop to talk with Sailors and Marines.

During his visit, he emphasized the importance of the mission in the war against terrorism during an All Hands Call. He also told the crew, "I want to thank you for your service and for what you're doing for America and the American people!" See Story on Page 9

PROUD EAGLES OF THE SEA

Congratulations to the following crewmembers for awards during the past quarter!

FROCKINGS

1ST CLASS



YN1(SW) Angela Baker
AC1(AW) Richard Burnell
GM1 Michael Coho
AK1(AW) Laurel Cornelison
SK1 Ronilo Cortes
AD1 Silverio Cruz
AS1 Allan Guiao
AT1 Shenandoah Holmes

ET1 Gary Lewman
SH1 Francisco Mendez
IC1(SW) Demetrius Norris
HM1(SW/AW) Eugene Penabella
AS1 Manuel Peralta
SK1 Rita Ramirez
MM1 Esters Wright

2ND CLASS



BM2 Alex Alvarez
OS2 James Artero
OS2 Jennifer Boyer
PH2 Lawrence Carlson
FC2 Kurt Cederburg
ABH2 Angel Dominguez

MM2 Octavio Echeverry
GM2 Michael Edwards
PH2 Robert Ellis
IS2 Jennifer Fitts
MS2 Julius Gomez
HT2 Teena Gusler
BM2 James Hamill
FC2 Anh Huynh
YN2 Vealyn Johnson
MM2 Curtis Martin
AK2 Antonio Nava
AT2 Joseph Neil
MR2 Daniel Nitcznski
ABF2 Romeo Palmares
EM2 Carlos Ramirez
AD2 Roderick Ramirez
AC2 Pedro Rivas
ABF2 Ata Albaro Rodriguezsalas
BM2 Jose Sanchez
IS2 Tiffany Sherman
IT2 Edward Smith
MS2 Todd Smith
OS2(SW/AW) Aimee Sowell
MM2 Leslie Tidball
MM2 John Walker

FROCKINGS

EM2 Santiago White

3RD CLASS



ABF3 Ty Colvin
AK3 Adrien Dixon
ABH3 Brett Doud
PC3 Kendric Drake
IT3 Rod Drozd
ABF3 Karla Duarte
AK3 Jerome Exum
HM3 Koudjo Elitsa
IT3 Vanessa Fabbillpalmer
AS3 Juan Garcia Laguna
AO3 Adam Gilmore
MM3 Gonzalo Guerreroavilla
AC3 Marissa Gutierrez
SH3 Cezar Hernandez
SM3 Jesus Hernandez
IT3 Antoine Hickman
OS3 Gloria Hurtado
SM3 Robert Irby
GSM3 Gregory Jasso
EM3 Joseph Jaylo
AO3 Brian Kephart
MM3 Arvel Loyola
MS3 Shannon Long
ABH3 Robert Marshall
ABH3 Akiel Mayers
SK3 Oddeth Mitchell
SH3 Yara Paredes
ABF3 Alda Raspallo
MA3 Robert Regan
ABF3 Brian Riley
QM3 Elsa Risher
MS3 Daniel Rodriguez
IT3 Carl Sabas
IT3 Shalimar Salvador
AO3 Brent Schulmeister
AG3 Rebecca Smedley
OS3 Casey Smith
EM3 Rudy Sorto
ABF3 Isaac Sotoguerra
BM3 John Vanells

SH3 Cyd Aguas
AD3(AW) Mario Arias
SK3 Rebecca Avery
AK3 Jorge Bailon
PC3 Kristie Baldwin
CTO3 Brandon Bernal
BM3(SW) Brandon Burtenshaw
AZ3 Teresa Cano

FROCKINGS

BM3 Matthew Vanwesten
BM3 Joshua Waugh

ENLISTED SURFACE WARFARE SPECIALIST (ESWS)



AG1(SW) Jeffrey Jackson
OS1(SW) Curtis Speights
BM2(SW) Delilah Davis
BM2(SW) Franklin Delosreyes
MS2(SW) Julius Gomez
YN2(SW) Kyla Groll
SM2(SW) Erin Jolley
ABH2(SW) Robert Newton
OS2(SW) Shakendrick Tilley
AO2(SW) Alejandro Valdez
BM3(SW) Eric Alexander
AM3(SW/AW) Christopher Bailey
PN3(SW) Nezhia Burkes
BM3(SW) Stephanie Garibaldi
MM3(SW) Lashawna Patterson
EM3(SW) Ebony Jenkins
AN(AW/SW) Ana Byron

ENLISTED AVIATION WARFARE SPECIALIST (EAWS)



ITC(SW/AW) Vanessa Rayner
MA1(SW/AW) Denise Garcia
DM1(SW/AW) Val Trecha
OS2(SW/AW) Aimee Sowell
ADAN(AW) Arias-Davison

NAVY COMMENDATION MEDALS

HT1 Ike Chandler
MM1 William Morris

NAVY COMMENDATION MEDALS

AS1 Jason Anchetta
AZ1 Jarvis Dean
YN1(AW) Kimberly Jackson
AS1(AW) Benny Oga
MS2(SW/AW) Jason Simmons
EW2(SW) Michael Arrowsmith

SECNAV VISITS USS TARAWA

TELLS SAILORS, MARINES TO BE READY

By JOC(SW) W.R. Polson

The Secretary of the Navy personally delivered a message to be prepared to the Sailors and Marines on board USS Tarawa, and they collectively replied that they're ready during a brief visit to the ship off the coast of Southern California Oct. 24.

The Honorable Gordon R. England and his official party flew aboard for a mid-morning visit to meet and talk with embarked Sailors and Marines of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and to let them know that their hard work is appreciated.

"I want to thank you for your service, and for what you're doing for America and the American people, because this is vitally, vitally important," said Mr. England. "I can tell you the President appreciates what you're doing and the American people appreciate what you do."

His speech to a combined formation of approximately 2,000 Sailors and Marines during an All Hands Call was brief, but the message carried far. Standing on an elevated platform in front of a massive American flag, Mr. England emphasized the urgency of the TARAWA ARG's upcoming deployment overseas.

"Terrorism is a bonafide threat," he said referring to al Qaeda and other associated terrorist organizations. "This is the first time in the history of mankind that

very small numbers of people have been able to wreak havoc against our citizens, against our families and against our cities."

The SECNAV's visit to the "Eagle of the Sea" came as part of an official 5-day trip to the Southwest Region that stretched from

leaders – led by Capt. Ronald Thomas, Commander, Amphibious Squadron Seven; Col. Thomas Waldhauser, Commanding Officer, 15th MEU; and Capt. Jay Bowling, Commanding Officer, USS Tarawa.

"The SECNAV was a very personable individual and came across as being very caring for the typical Sailor and Marine," said Capt. Bowling. "And if I gleaned anything from him, it was to take care of your people, because they are a national asset. We need them now more than anytime in American history."

After meeting with the commanding officers, Mr. England spent most of his remaining time with junior service members. In addition to shaking hands and taking personal photos with the Sailors and Marines after the All Hands Call, he went down to the aft main engine room to talk to Sailors on watch and later ate lunch on the mess decks.

"It builds our confidence to have him come out, and it let's us know that he knows what's going on out here," said Airman Anna Byron.

"Meeting the Secretary of the Navy isn't something that we get to do every day. This is something I'm going to be able to look back on," said Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Delmar Hobkirk.

Before leaving, Mr. England thanked his hosts for America's long tradition of defending liberty. He said, "I just want to say, 'Thank you and God bless you for what you're doing, and thanks to your families.'"



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones.

Above, Lance Cpl. Roberto Rodriguez (in white flight jacket) escorts Mr. England (center) onboard.

Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado to USS Tarawa, off the coast of Southern California.

Among the VIPs who came with the SECNAV for the visit to TARAWA were Rear Adm. W. C. Marsh, Commander, Amphibious Group THREE, and Lt. Gen. Michael Hagee, Commanding General, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

Before his speech, Mr. England met with the TARAWA ARG

Training Helps Prepare Crew for Deployment



Photo by PH3(AW) Rodney Jones

Above, enlisted landing signalman from Air Department (yellow jacket) guide a trio of AV-8B Harrier jets onto USS Tarawa's flight deck

As Tarawa steamed off the coast of Southern California, Harrier jets roared off the flight deck, Sailors busily performed aircraft maintenance in the hangar bay, and Marines, packed with combat gear, loaded onto landing craft.

All of this was part of an exercise named Component Training While Underway Exercise (COMPTUEX) that took place from Oct. 21-31.

"This is the first phase towards certifying the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit to deploy aboard TARAWA," said Capt. Bowling. "This is the first time in our inter-deployment training cycle that we, as an amphibious assault ship, worked with the Marines to get them ready for deployment. Basically, we're ironing out operational issues."

As the exercise progressed, the crew quickly adapted to the routine of a ship preparing for deployment. Down in the well deck, Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Joel Smith performed his duties as well deck safety observer to ensure an accident-free environment for the launch and recovery of

the various embarked landing craft.

"The training in the well deck prepares us for operations we could face during deployment," said Smith, who watches out for such things as a boat line possibly under too much strain or a Sailor not focusing on the job at hand.

For Aviation Boatswain's Mate 2nd

close with the Marines. Now we're helping each other become familiar with the ways we conduct operations onboard. This allows us to be on the same page so we know what to do in a real situation," said Wildigg.

One person whose job helps bring the Navy "blue" and the Marine "green" sides together is Gunnery Sgt. Dennis Grimm, a member of TARAWA's combat cargo department. Grimm's department helps coordinate the movement of troops and material on and off the ship.

"Transferring equipment and personnel takes a lot of coordination between operations on the flight deck and down in the well deck, so we've got to learn to get it right, here and now," said Grimm. "Exercises like this one teach us how, because when we get to the other side of the world there won't be any second chances to get it right."

By JOC(SW) W.R. Polson and
JO2 Crystal King



Photo by JOC(SW) W.R. Polson

Plane handlers, Airman Apprentice Karen Gruenert (left) and Airman Apprentice Marissa Gutierrez, prepare chains for securing aircraft in the hangar bay.

Class Luke Wildigg, COMPTUEX meant a lot of long hard hours on the flight deck landing Marine Harrier jets and helicopters.

"So far, we haven't trained this

Top Athletes Reach Out to Sailors



Glyn Milburn, a former NFL All Pro, takes a photo with Petty Officer 2nd Class Larry Sherrill (left) and Airman Recruit Veronica Paster during a visit Nov. 5.

Photo by JOC(SW) W.R. Polson

By JOC(SW) W.R. Polson

Sometimes, you just need a little faith, as three former professional sports stars who visited the ship recently can attest. Former National Hockey League lineman Adam Burt and National Football League veterans Glyn Milburn and Mark Thomas brought some of that faith to share with Tarawa Sailors during a visit in early November sponsored by the Force Ministries Program.

"We were really excited about this visit," said Adam Burt, a 14-year NHL veteran who skated for the Hartford Whalers, the Stanley Cup champion Philadelphia Flyers and the Atlanta Thrashers. "Coming out here and talking to these young men and women just seemed like the right thing to do."

Mark Thomas, a former NFL defensive end for the 49ers, Panthers, Bears and Colts who spent his time during the 1990s running down quarterbacks such as Troy Aikman and Brett Favre, now was spending his time keeping up with tour guide Petty Officer 2nd Class Larry Sherrill.

"It was fantastic to meet these guys," said Sherrill, who helped

show off the ship to the group. "I've never met a celebrity before and I respect what they do."

Sherrill, along with Airman Recruit Veronica Paster, took the group on a tour that led from the signal bridge on the upper levels of the ship — where former All Pro kick returner Glyn Milburn took a moment for a few photos with crewmembers — all the way down to the engine rooms below the water level.

"They were really nice people and I had fun taking them around," said Paster. "I also got to learn about their lives and lifestyles, but most of all they wanted us to know that they appreciate what we do everyday."

Following lunch in the wardroom, the three athletes spoke to a group of Sailors on the flight deck, discussing various aspects about their faith and support for the men and women in uniform.

"Sometimes the athletes that are out in the public eye don't represent what we are all about. This is not about us, as athletes," said Burt. "You guys are laying it down for us and we want you to know that we respect what you do. You're on our minds and in our hearts."

CMC Moment

I would like to take a moment to introduce myself before starting. I'm Command Master Chief Tom Shields. Originally from New York, I grew up in Wisconsin and enlisted in the Navy in 1972. As Tarawa's CMC, I represent and work with all enlisted Sailors onboard the ship.

We have a lot to cover in a short space, so let's get started.

First off, I would like to recognize a new member of our Tarawa team, Katherine Emery, who volunteered to be one of our ombudsmen during the upcoming deployment. She was the ombudsman on USS Constellation, so she has a lot to offer.

On another note, we were very surprised when the advancement results recently came back for Petty Officers. Normally the results don't come back until late November or December. This time, we had about 115 people who were selected for promotion. We had more selected than normal for Petty Officer First Class -- a total of 15 -- so that was a very good thing.

We've also recently selected our new Sailors of the Quarter. For the Junior Sailor of the Quarter, we had Airman Veronica Paster from the V-3 Division. We also selected BM2 Larry Sherrill and SH1 Payumo (see story on P. 3). So a big "Well Done!" to those Sailors.

Our Surface and Air Warfare qualification programs are very active. When a person qualifies in those programs, they have a better general knowledge of the ship, so in the end they are better Sailors and better able to help the ship.

As we get ready to deploy, I want to encourage the families to work with our ombudsmen, Mrs. Emery and Nadine Shaw. Your Sailors will be well cared for. Hopefully we will have email going on a regular basis so you can stay in touch with your Sailor. Take care and have a good holiday season.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

**COMMANDING OFFICER
USS TARAWA (LHA 1)
FPO AP 96622-1600**

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Happy Holidays

